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ABSTRACT

The adults who participate in classes, workshops, and other learning opportunities are as diverse as the kinds of programs in which they enroll and the reasons for which they enroll. Adult learners are multifaceted, appreciate flexibility in teaching strategies, and want a say in what they will learn. These purposes for adult education are evident: (1) to help people acquire tools for physical, psychological, and social survival; (2) to help people discover a sense of meaning in their lives; (3) to help people learn how to learn; and (4) to help communities provide a more humane social, psychological, and physical environment for their members. Providers of adult education can be divided into four categories: tax-supported agencies and institutions; nonprofit, self-supporting agencies and institutions; for-profit providers; and nonformal learning opportunities. Some trends and issues that the field of adult education faces in the years ahead include the emerging learning society, quality concerns, adult illiteracy, and influence of information technology. (32 references) (YLB)

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Adult Education: The Way to Lifelong Learning

Jerold W. Apps

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The Way to Lifelong Learning

by
Jerold W. Apps

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Introduction

Human beings are learning creatures; we are always learning. It matters not our age or address, our income level or the color of our skin. We learn from the moment we first draw breath until the moment when we breathe our last.

The need to learn throughout life is imperative because change is the only constant in our society. Most of us must keep learning to keep up with our jobs and our lives. Adult/continuing education (hereafter called adult education) provides learning opportunities for the constantly increasing numbers of adults who are searching for additional opportunities to learn.

In the first chapter, I give a brief description of adult learners and some of the characteristics of the programs in which they enroll. The next chapter will discuss the many providers of adult education. Finally, in the last chapter I will share a brief account of several trends and issues in the field.

Understanding Adult Learners

The adults who participate in classes, workshops, and other learning opportunities are as diverse as the kinds of programs in which they enroll. The adult learner ranges from those still in their teens but with major family or work responsibilities to those in their 80s and beyond. And their purposes for enrolling in adult education also are diverse.

The vast majority of those who participate in adult education programs are from 20 to 40 years old. Most of these adults enroll for job-related reasons. For example, there are many women enrolled in these programs who are returning to work after raising a family. They need to obtain or update skills after being out of the workforce for a number of years. Many other adult learners who enroll for job-related reasons want either to advance in their current job or to change jobs.

Included in job-related programs are those sponsored by business and industry to increase the basic skills of their workers. These programs, which usually stress basic reading, computation, and writing skills, are an increasingly important component of adult education and account for expenditures of millions of dollars by companies each year.

Still another category of adult learners are such professional people as doctors, nurses, pharmacists, public school teachers, veterinarians, and the like, who are required to participate in continuing

education programs in order to maintain their licenses to practice and to obtain promotions and salary increases.

Millions of other adults, often unemployed, enroll in a variety of literacy programs sponsored by an assortment of providers ranging from public high schools to local libraries. Another increasingly larger group of adult learners includes recent immigrants to this country who enroll in courses on English as a second language. These courses, similar to literacy education programs, are offered by a vast number of providers.

Many people enroll in adult education programs to enhance their health (wellness programs, fitness programs, weight-loss programs), to develop some hobby or recreational pursuit (golf lessons, carpentry, bird study), or to develop some personal skill (writing, speaking, negotiating). One increasingly important group of these adult learners are senior citizens. Programs designed for these senior learners are a relatively recent occurrence, but they are increasing as the population ages and as seniors search for learning opportunities to make their lives meaningful and useful.

Spiritual renewal and study also attracts thousands of adults to Bible study and other religious and spiritually related programs.

Finally, there are those adults who seek out educational opportunities for the sheer joy of learning. These are the adults who enroll in book discussion clubs, audit literature courses offered by universities, and spend untold hours reading and studying on their own.

Many adults, deep down, are searching for meaning in their lives. Even if, on the surface, the majority appears to be learning for instrumental reasons (job, personal skill, language), many actually are searching for meaning. Through learning, they are often able to catch glimpses of who they are and where they have been, where they are now, and where they are headed. This search for meaning generally involves a conversation with self, a conversation with others, an interaction with some content, and an interaction with the environment around them.

Everyone has a creative spirit. For some it is buried deep within, aching to be released. Learning often provides the means for the release of this spirit, allowing it to be expressed – often to the surprise of both the learner and the facilitator of learning. As Carl Rogers wrote, a person is "a stream of becoming, not a finished product . . . a fluid process, not a fixed and static entity; a continually changing constellation of potentialities, not a fixed quantity of traits" (1961, p. 122).

Adults bring to educational settings a set of expectations, needs, deficiencies, assets, and barriers – some of them known to the person and many of them not. The barriers to adult learning are many. Some are psychological: low self-esteem, fear of failure. Many are social: What will my friends think of my returning to school? How will my family adjust to the time and money I am spending for this program? Some are physical: diminished hearing, physical disabilities. Many are economic: finding sufficient funds within the family's resources to allow an adult member to participate in education.

Adult learners are multi-faceted and often present bundles of contradictions. They want to be treated gently, yet they are often less than gentle to their fellow learners. They appear self-assured and confident one moment and the next are highly dependent and want to be shown what to learn and how to learn it. Sometimes they are clear about what they want to learn; other times they are confused and befuddled as to why they are enrolled in a particular class or workshop. At times, adult learners expect the teacher to have all the answers; other times they want to search out their own answers and look to the teacher as only a guide to point them in the right direction.

Adult learners appreciate flexibility in teaching strategies. Many are quite knowledgeable about how they learn best; and if an instructor sticks to one instructional approach, say lecturing, the person will be disappointed and often angry. Much work in adult education lends itself to cooperative learning, such as a community development program where groups of adults learn and work together to solve some

community problem. So, although adults often claim to know how they learn best, they often are surprised by how well they adjust to different teaching approaches.

In a sense all adult learners are part-time students, even when they are enrolled in a full-time program of study. They are part-time because, in addition to their student role, many of them are working. They are members of families, often with responsibilities for children. They are participants in community organizations, and so on. Being an adult learner is only one role in their lives, and often the student role is not the most important one for them. These multiple roles also mean role conflicts will develop from time to time. An adult student in a credit class misses an examination because of an ill youngster; an employer insists that the person take an out-of-town trip resulting in missing two important class sessions; or a spouse complains about the time a mate devotes to study, placing stress on the learner.

Adult learners generally want a say in what they will learn. Many have clear learning goals, and they expect the program they are enrolled in to meet them. A strategy often used by educators of adults is to spend time with them during the first few sessions to discover what their expectations are and then to fine-tune the course or workshop to the learners' expectations.

In certain areas, the adult learner will know little about the subject and will depend on the teacher to map out what will be learned. However, adults often know more about a subject than they realize. Master adult educators know this and incorporate into their instruction strategies that allow students to discover what they know. Through discussion, self-reflection, questioning, and journal writing, adult learners begin to uncover what they know. Such strategies also help adults to value what they know, even though they did not learn it in a formal educational setting or have a diploma or certificate as a credential. Because our society puts so much stress on credentials of one type or another, learning gained from life experiences tends to be discounted rather than prized.

Flexible teaching strategies that allow adults to participate by sharing their experience can enhance the learning situation greatly. Of course, there are problems with free-flowing discussions. Some participants insist on talking too much, others have difficulty keeping on the topic, still others will not say anything at all. These are the challenges for the teacher of adults.

The Purposes for Adult Education

When we look across all the various adult education programs, and the many providers of these programs, the following purposes become evident. Some providers emphasize several of these purposes, others may concentrate on only one.

1. *To help people acquire the tools for physical, psychological, and social survival.*

Many adult education programs concentrate on helping people develop work skills. Some of these programs focus on helping adults prepare for work, others focus on assisting workers to keep up with changing conditions, still others focus on career change.

Some programs provide coping skills for day-to-day living, including such basic skills as balancing check books, filling out job applications, reading transportation schedules, understanding how to obtain assistance from government agencies, and learning how to prevent health problems through good nutrition and exercise. There also are programs on relationship skills for dealing with marriage problems, children, neighbors, and fellow workers.

Providing skills for positive use of leisure time is yet another purpose. Many adults have become trapped into becoming passive consumers of entertainment – viewing television, watching sporting events – with limited personal involvement. Often the reason for limited participation in leisure is the lack of skills for creative use of leisure time.

A few adult education programs emphasize learning skills and techniques for effecting social change. Sometimes such programs can be controversial because the participants become actively involved in social change in their communities. The premise of such programs is that social change skills are learned best – some would say, only – by becoming directly involved in social change activity. These programs take a variety of forms. For example, in a social change workshop I taught a few years ago, participants visited several retirement homes in the community and discovered that local pharmacies appeared to be charging excessively for prescriptions. Participants in the workshop organized a group of seniors who eventually confronted the pharmacies and were able to negotiate more reasonable prices.

2. *To help people discover a sense of meaning in their lives.*

Various educational programs provide opportunities for participation in the arts and humanities, including courses in painting, writing, dance, music appreciation, and bird watching. All of these activities help adults to probe the depths of their inner spirits and to discover what it means to be a human being in the world.

Also included in this category are courses that teach people to write their life stories, which not only provide valuable historical information for their families but also help participants discover a new sense of meaning in their lives. I have taught life-story writing workshops for several years and have been impressed with the depth with which adults are willing to probe their pasts. About half way through a week-long workshop, I have seen participants express a new excitement and satisfaction about their lives. Many share incidents of tragedy and sorrow but also tell stories of joy and happiness as a counterpoint to the downside in their personal histories.

Personal meaning in the lives of adults also can result from the new sense of self-confidence that emerges when they have earned a degree in a rigorous academic area, mastered a skill, such as learning to use a computer, or even something as simple as learning to paddle a canoe.

3. *To help people learn how to learn.*

Many adult education programs teach the skills of learning how to learn. In fact, an underlying theme for much of adult education is to provide adults with the skills they need to become autonomous, self-directed learners. Even after years of formal schooling, many adults still depend on somebody telling them what they should learn and how they should learn it. So what are some of these learning-to-learn skills?

First is the skill of being able to see the whole picture rather than merely the parts. As Peter Senge argues, we must help people see the "interrelationships rather than things . . . patterns of change rather than static 'snapshots' " (1990, p. 68). By seeing the relationships of individuals and events to the whole picture, people can move from being passive reactors to situations to being shapers of their own reality, to being able to take charge of their lives.

Second is a combination of skills that fall under the rubric of critical thinking. These skills include the ability to analyze situations and statements, to challenge assumptions, to probe the meaning of metaphors, and to question the use of terms that seem vague or misleading.

Another skill of critical thinking involves searching for alternative solutions to questions or problems, including forcing oneself to go beyond traditional sources to find answers and cautioning oneself about relying on answers from a single source.

Critical thinking also involves an inward dimension, that is, examining one's own beliefs and values in light of new information and ideas that one encounters. Such self-examination can be threatening in that it can challenge long-held beliefs and possibly replace them with new beliefs. Many adults engaging in critical thinking at this deeper level experience a transformation and to some extent become different people.

Still another learning-to-learn skill is knowing how to assess one's own progress without external assistance. Taking responsibility for assessing one's own progress flies in the face of conventional assess-

ment where some external authority administers tests or other forms of evaluation. By contrast, with self-assessment adults come to assume they are responsible for their own learning, which includes assessment. One of the ways adults can conduct their own assessment is keeping a portfolio containing a record of their learning achievement. The portfolio might include summaries of important ideas gleaned from readings or lectures. It might also include samples of skills tried and mastered. Another way of self-assessment is keeping a journal with daily entries about new ideas one has encountered and reflections on how one feels about them.

A final learning-to-learn skill is knowing how to use the tools for accessing information. Here I am referring to such traditional tools as the library card catalog as well as more recent technological innovations, such as the computerized card catalog, audio- and videotapes, and interactive television, to name a few.

4. *To help communities provide a more humane social, psychological, and physical environment for their members.*

While the previous three purposes focus on the individual, the field of adult education also is concerned about social change. Examples of this approach to adult education include the work of literacy educator Paulo Freire (1970), who not only taught Brazilian peasants literacy but simultaneously enabled them to confront a system that oppressed them. The late Miles Horton assisted with union organizing and promoting the civil rights movement in Appalachia. He invited local citizens to the Highlander Center, where they learned about themselves and their communities and, most important, learned skills they could use to help bring about change in their communities.

This purpose for adult education is controversial; but not all adult educators subscribe to it, preferring to keep educational functions separate from social action. Those who do subscribe to societal change as a purpose for adult education argue that since many problems can not be solved by individuals working alone, they must be confronted by people working together. Some programs, such as the community

development component of the Cooperative Extension Service, confront problems head on. Adult educators work with local citizens, helping them to organize into groups, providing them resources for analyzing and understanding their community problems, and then providing them alternative strategies for acting to solve community problems.

The philosophy behind this purpose emphasizes empowering people to take charge of their communities. It is education within the context of citizens working to solve various community problems. They learn while they are acting. They learn to cooperate, to analyze problems, to find resources, to make political decisions, and to exercise leadership skills.

With this overview of the characteristics of adult learners and the purposes of adult education, let us turn now to a description of the places where adult education occurs in our society.

Where Adult Education Occurs

According to Bryson (1936), the early providers of adult education in this country were lyceums, chautauquas, women's clubs, and correspondence schools. Lyceums were a series of public lectures that began in 1826 in Massachusetts. By 1834 some 3,000 lyceums had been established across the country. Lecturers included Emerson, Thoreau, Lowell, Henry Ward Beecher, and many more. According to Bryson, "There is good reason to believe that the public school system of Massachusetts and the pioneering of Horace Mann got popular support because of things said and done in Lyceum meetings. In other words, the education of parents helped to build better schools for children" (pp. 15-16).

The Chautauqua Institution was established in 1871 on the shores of Chautauqua Lake, New York, as a summer training camp for Methodist Sunday school teachers and soon spread across the country. It grew into a program for the public that included music, art, drama, lectures on current issues, and courses on such topics as American history and geography.

Women's clubs began appearing in the 1870s with a focus on the health and general self-improvement of women. Many of these clubs and those that grew out of them continue to this day. They include the League of Women Voters, the American Association of University Women, the Business and Professional Women's Clubs, and the Homemaker clubs organized by the Cooperative Extension Service in the early 1900s.

Correspondence study had been popular in Europe for many years before the Society to Encourage Studies at Home was organized in the United States in 1873. The Chautauqua began offering correspondence courses by 1883. Soon university extension divisions were offering instruction through the mail. And many commercial correspondence schools began offering instruction on writing, sketching, business subjects, and many other topics. One of the earliest commercial correspondence courses dealt with safety in mines.

By 1936 there were nine major providers of adult education in this country: 1) public schools, 2) federal programs such as agricultural extension and vocational classes resulting from the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, 3) federal emergency programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, 4) colleges and universities, 5) libraries, 6) museums, 7) religious organizations, 8) workers' groups, and 9) parent-teacher groups.

In 1986 the U.S. Department of Education offered a somewhat different classification, dividing the providers of adult education into nine categories: 1) four-year colleges and universities; 2) two-year community colleges, junior colleges, and technical institutes; 3) vocational, trade, and business schools including hospitals; 4) elementary and high schools; 5) other schools; 6) private community organizations such as churches, synagogues, YMCA, and Red Cross; 7) governmental agencies; 8) labor organizations and professional associations; and 9) tutors, private instructors, and others. This classification focused on adult education course offerings and does not include self-directed learning activities or even participation in conferences, workshops, and other kinds of educational programs that technically are not courses.

Still another classification is one I recently developed (Apps 1989) that divides the providers of adult education into four categories: 1) tax supported, 2) nonprofit, 3) for profit, and 4) non-organized educational opportunities. I have not included self-directed learning as a separate category, assuming that such learning can occur within any

of the four categories above. I shall use this classification for describing examples of adult education providers below.

Tax-Supported Agencies and Institutions

Public schools. Many school districts offer an array of adult education courses and classes, ranging from carpentry and crafts to adult literacy programs. In some areas, public school adult education is labeled as community education or the "lighted school house."

Four-year colleges and universities. Correspondence study has long been an important adult education program for many colleges and universities. The first successful collegiate correspondence program began at the University of Chicago in 1892. Now many colleges and universities offer courses and degrees through such media as interactive computers, satellite video, and teleconferencing. Almost all colleges and universities also offer non-credit courses, classes, workshops, and conferences for a broad community audience. Other types of adult education offered by colleges and universities include courses provided by extension and outreach divisions and various alumni programs, cooperative programs with business and industry, and special evening and weekend classes designed specifically for adult students.

In addition, the number of adult students pursuing degrees on college and university campuses has steadily increased over the years. In 1982, adults 25 and older made up 39% of the students enrolled in both two- and four-year colleges. By 1992 this figure has climbed to where nearly half of higher education's students are 25 or older. About 20% of higher education students in 1992 were 35 or older, with some 85% of these students studying part time. Thus it is clear that colleges and universities also serve older students seeking undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Some colleges and universities have organized special degree programs focused entirely on adults who are working full time. Examples include Nova University in Florida, Teachers College Columbia

University, Walden University in Minneapolis, and the School for New Learning at DePaul University in Chicago.

Community and technical colleges. Similar to four-year institutions, community and technical colleges are increasingly making their programs available to an adult audience, both on and off campus.

Cooperative Extension. Dating back to passage of the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, Cooperative Extension continues to be a major provider of adult education programs in this country. Organized as a cooperative effort among federal, state, and local governments with the land-grant university as the state partner, Cooperative Extension has agents located in nearly every county in the country. Programs focus on family living, youth development, agricultural production and marketing, community and economic development, environmental education, leadership development, and other topics.

Armed forces. In addition to the training in specialized areas dealing with weapons and military operations, most military bases offer an assortment of education programs, often in cooperation with nearby community colleges and four-year colleges and universities. Armed forces personnel often are able to enroll in degree programs while they serve on active duty.

Correctional institutions. Prison education has been an important adult education effort for many years. Programs range from literacy education to high school equivalency education (GED) to college-level work. These programs often are conducted in cooperation with a nearby postsecondary institution – a vocational-technical college, a community college, or a four-year institution.

Libraries and museums. Often overlooked as providers of adult education, libraries and museums continue to provide an assortment of programs ranging from art appreciation courses to the work that reference librarians do in connecting adult learners to resources they need. Through a network of international computer databases in reference libraries, people are able to obtain information on every imaginable topic.

Nonprofit, Self-Supporting Agencies and Institutions

Religious institutions. Churches, synagogues, and other religious communities are major providers of adult education in most communities. In addition to workshops and courses of a spiritual nature, many religious institutions offer workshops on understanding one's community and developing skills in self-understanding and improving family life. Some religious institutions are actively involved in social change projects; some provide teams to work in foreign countries, helping local citizens to organize and assisting in building housing and health facilities and the like.

Health institutions. Hospitals and clinics offer courses and workshops on a wide variety of health-related topics, such as how to lose weight, how to reduce stress, how to live with an infirmity, and how to take care of yourself when you are older and live alone. Physical fitness programs have become popular programs for many hospitals and clinics. Health institutions increasingly are using such educational devices as computerized phone-in services, where a person can call a number and request a tape on almost any health-related topic. In addition, these days doctors and nurses often routinely incorporate wellness education when treating patients.

Community-based agencies. Agencies such as Red Cross, YMCA, and YWCA long have been important providers of educational opportunities in communities, offering an array of programs.

Service clubs. Kiwanis, Rotary, and other service clubs offer educational opportunities at their weekly meetings and through the various community service projects they sponsor.

Voluntary organizations. Here are included such organizations as the League of Women Voters, Sierra Club, Nature Conservancy, and many more. Adult education offerings range from social action and advocacy to workshops, TV programs, newsletters, and magazines.

Professional organizations. Organizations such as state bars, medical associations, associations of engineers, and a host of other professional groups provide continuing education for their members in a

variety of forms. These range from videotape courses and workshops to individual consultations.

Worker education programs. Unions, at every level, provide education programs for their members. Many of these focus on leadership development.

National adult education organizations. The Learning Resources Network in Manhattan, Kansas, publishes a weekly newsletter for adult educators, offers a series of workshops during the year, and holds an annual meeting. It serves as a networking agency for the thousands of educators who conduct classes and workshops for adults in a variety of settings.

The American Association of Adult and Continuing Education offers educators of adults various opportunities for keeping current in the field. The association publishes a research journal (*Adult Education Quarterly*) and a practitioner-oriented magazine (*Adult Learning*). It also holds a national meeting and serves as a coordinating link with state and regional adult education associations.

The Office of Adult Learning Services of the College Board in New York provides workshops and conferences for administrators and others who work with adults enrolled in various higher education settings. An example of the conferences they sponsor was one titled, "Lifelong Education in America: Becoming a 'Nation of Students'."

The Center for Adult Learning, American Council on Education conducts research projects, offers conferences and workshops, and develops and administers the GED (high school equivalency) program for adults wishing to complete their high school education. The center also works with the military, labor, business and industry, and higher education to examine adult education issues and problems.

For-Profit Providers

Correspondence schools. There are many of these, some with questionable reputations, others quite professional and legitimate. The National Home Study Council accredits home-study schools. They

regularly publish a directory listing those schools that have met a list of standards, including competent faculty, educationally sound and up-to-date courses, and truthful advertising of programs. Schools listed in the current directory range from the American Academy of Nutrition, which offers a diploma in nutrition, to Worldspan Travel Academy, jointly owned by Delta, Northwest, and TWA and offering courses in travel agency and airline reservations.

Proprietary schools. Truck driving schools, electronics schools, hairdresser schools, and a host of others make up this category of for-profit providers of adult education. In recent years, several proprietary schools have been under fire for accepting federal loans for their students and then not providing the quality instruction that they advertised. Some also made wild claims of job opportunities that often proved to be untrue.

Private tutors and teachers. This is an old form of adult education where the teacher provides one-on-one instruction. An example is providing music lessons to adult students who decide they want to play an instrument. Tutoring appears to be on the increase with many adults, particularly those in their early retirement, who want to take up a new leisure pursuit.

For-profit, degree-granting colleges and universities. For-profit institutions are springing up across the country. Some are highly questionable; and some are downright dishonest, earning them the label of "degree mill." Others, like the Electronic University in California, tie to legitimate and accredited institutions and meet the standards set by accrediting agencies in higher education.

The Electronic University is really an educational communications system that links students with other students and with instructors throughout the United States. Transcripts are issued directly by the academic institution offering the courses. Associate and undergraduate degrees in arts and business are available through the network and are coordinated and administered by Thomas A. Edison State College. Instruction for the Electronic University is provided via interactive computers.

In addition to the free-standing, for-profit degree programs, several firms offer accredited degree programs. An example is the Arthur D. Little Management Education Institution in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which offers a one-year master of science in management. The program is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

A hallmark of for-profit institutions is their innovation in providing educational opportunities, often using state-of-the-art communications technology, and especially by accommodating adult students who need flexible schedules that traditional campuses do not offer.

Consultant and workshop providers. My last check of the the directory, *Training*, indicated that some 1,300 firms offered educational programs, activities, and materials for adult learners. Most of these were consulting firms offering programs for businesses on such topics as fitness, affirmative action, improving communication skills, strategic planning, negotiating techniques, stress management, and a host of others.

For-profit workshops and short courses have sprung up like dandelions in a spring lawn. Recently while visiting in Wilmington, Delaware, I noticed that the Boscov Department Store offers an array of courses and workshops. They call it Boscov's Campus of Courses and offer 83 courses and workshops with fees ranging from free to $15. Offerings included a one-session workshop on how to make a Victorian floral basket, a five-session course on the nuts and bolts of volunteer administration, and a five-session course on stress management at home and work.

Garden centers offer courses. So do computer stores, craft stores, and a host of others. The Dale Carnegie program and Berlitz language programs are other examples of for-profit providers. Not to be overlooked is the weight-reduction industry, one of the largest for-profit providers of classes and workshops for adults in the country.

Publishers of how-to books, videotapes, and audio tapes. Visit any bookstore these days, whether it be in your neighborhood or at an

airport, and you will see a sizable section of books and audio- and videotapes intended for adult learning, particularly for people in business. I recently spent an hour in the Philadelphia airport and noticed books ranging from developing a business vision to surviving budget cutbacks. Audio- and videotapes abound, many on personal motivation, stress management, and the like. Adult education is big business for many publishers, even though they may not think of themselves as adult education providers.

Business and industry human resource development programs. Usually offered only for a firm's employees, human resource development programs are designed to increase profitability and productivity of the firm's work force, at every level.

Non-Organized Learning Opportunities

Not to be overlooked as educational providers for the adult learner are travel, recreational and leisure-time activities, television viewing, and work. All of these continue to provide learning opportunities for adults, as they have in the past.

From this brief overview of the common providers of adult education, one can see that programs take a variety of forms, ranging from independent study to electronic media to tutoring as well as the more traditional classroom instruction. In the next chapter we will explore some of the trends and issues facing adult education.

Trends and Issues

Adult education is changing continuously. Some of the trends and issues the field faces in the years ahead include the following:

The Emerging Learning Society

More than two decades ago, Robert Hutchins, former president of the University of Chicago, had a vision about a learning society. He said that a learning society is "one that, in addition to offering part-time education to every man and woman at every stage of grown-up life, had succeeded in transforming its values in such a way that learning, fulfillment, becoming human, had become its aims and all its institutions were directed to this end" (1968, pp. 164-65).

The learning society is here. There are several reasons to account for its coming. All adults, no matter what they do or where they fit in our increasingly complex society, must learn in order to survive. For some this means continuous learning on the job in order to keep up with constantly changing occupational demands. For others it means learning new skills in order to make a career change or to re-enter the job market after being away for several years, for instance, women whose children are now raised.

Increasingly, adults are learning for the sake of learning. They are choosing subjects that interest them, and they pursue these interests vigorously. For instance, I recently taught at a week-long residential

center where my co-instructors taught Shakespeare's *Henry V* and Jane Austin's *Pride and Prejudice*. Fifteen students met daily to discuss these works, to debate the authors' meanings, and to reflect on their significance. They enrolled for no discernable pragmatic reason other than that they were interested in learning.

The learning society also means that all members of a society, young and old alike, learn within educational institutions and outside of them. "Lifelong learning" and "taking charge of one's learning" are guide words for the learning society. Lifelong learners, particularly adult learners, no longer want to depend on just traditional providers of education. They want to create their own learning opportunities. Self-directed learning is a key element of a learning society.

Developing and refining learning skills throughout people's lives is necessary for a learning society to flourish. These learning skills are important elements of all schooling – elementary, secondary, and higher education. Many adult education programs continue to stress these learning skills.

A learning society means that we must see education and learning in a much broader context than we have in the past. We must begin to see how elementary, secondary, and higher education relate to adult education. Teachers at all levels must begin to meet and discuss, sharing ideas about curriculum and teaching approaches. Separating adult education from the rest of education is no longer appropriate, if it ever was.

A learning society suggests that formal schooling is just one small part of a person's lifelong education. For many people, learning outside of formal education, through either organized providers or activities they create for themselves, is critical. Schooling should prepare these people for a lifetime of learning.

Quality Concerns

The issues of quality will become more important as adult education increases and as a variety of providers enters the marketplace.

Some argue that the market should be allowed to work, with high quality programs surviving and those of marginal or poor quality falling by the wayside. Those who subscribe to this position argue that many traditional programs use standards of quality (as they define them) to prevent innovative and more entrepreneurial providers from gaining a share of the market. Many innovative programs, they argue, may require quite different standards; and to hold them to standards developed for traditional, and sometimes obsolete, programs is to discourage new approaches. Proponents of this position also argue that it is better to encourage new approaches that meet the needs and demands of contemporary adult learners, even if there is some risk with regard to standards of quality.

On the other side of the quality issue are those at the extreme, who want to license, accredit, or otherwise control every adult education activity. Learners must be protected, they argue. In support of their position, they point out that we have national standards for food manufacturers, automobile makers, medical providers, house builders, and so on. Why then should adult educators not be subject to national standards?

The issue of quality in adult education has been heating up for some time. The fire is fueled by disclosure of diploma mills that exist on paper only, by over-zealous promoters of for-profit workshops who promise much more than they can deliver, and by profit-seeking consultants who sometimes display questionable ethics in their quest to make a dollar. Non-profit providers are not lily white either. Many college and university adult education units have been accused of excessive marketing, with more concern for filling chairs than for providing quality programs.

The pressure for more regulation in adult education will increase unless adult educators themselves can work out a system for quality control. It is not an easy task. The future of the field calling for new teaching strategies and new uses of electronic media will require an entrepreneurial spirit that can be squelched by inappropriate standards.

On the other hand, adult consumers deserve to receive a quality product for money spent.

Adult Illiteracy

Illiteracy has become a major problem in the United States, and no easy solutions are in sight. Forrest Chisman states that "at least 20 to 30 million adult Americans are seriously handicapped in their work and in their everyday lives by deficient basic literacy skills" (1990, p. 1). Basic literacy skills generally include five areas: reading, writing, verbal communication in English, math, and problem-solving skills. Functional literacy is a term often used when discussing basic literacy skills.

To take the discussion out of the abstract, not long ago I had lunch with a friend who is an executive at the Motorola Corporation. "One of the biggest problems we face in our firm," he said, "is the low level of literacy our new hires bring to the job." I thought he was referring to electronic literacy, or maybe advanced mathematics concepts. Indeed not. He went on to paint for me a picture of the young people they had recently hired out of high schools who could not read, write, speak, or do enough mathematics for them to perform the most basic tasks on the production line, such as the ability to read an instruction manual and follow directions.

As a result, Motorola has launched its own literacy education program. This firm is certainly not alone in undertaking such programs. What has come to be called "workplace education," with much of it focusing on literacy skills, is increasingly being sponsored by business and industry throughout the country.

To make the problem of illiteracy even more complicated, a large percentage of the 20 million to 30 million adults who do not have sufficient basic skills to function effectively in our society also suffer from severe economic and social problems. The two are, of course, closely related. Inadequate basic skills equals low income and social problems. These social problems take a variety of forms, but we all

know about them: drug abuse, crime, teenage pregnancy, and several others.

The literacy problem is not solely within the purview of adult education. Educators at all levels would like to help people become functionally literate before they leave secondary school. Educators, parents, business partners, and the community at large all have a stake in helping to correct this problem.

The adult education field is pouring millions of dollars into adult literacy programs, with no end in sight. In fact, the problem appears to be growing worse. A major portion of the program funding comes from government-supported programs. For example, in 1990 the Adult Education Act funded $158 million in grants to states for adult literacy programs. These government-funded programs provided literacy services to adults at all levels up to high school equivalency. They also included English-as-a-second-language programs for people with limited English proficiency.

With the need so great for funding literacy programs, attention to other adult education efforts has diminished. And with so much discussion about literacy strategies (obviously needed), discussion seldom takes place about innovative adult education efforts that meet other needs and satisfy other interests.

Some adult education leaders believe that the attention to literacy efforts is dealing only with symptoms of much larger problems. They argue that adult education should pay more attention to root causes of the literacy problem and then set out to effect some fundamental societal change. These efforts, often controversial, suggest that adult education programs ought to focus on communities rather than on individuals, that they should help people become empowered to deal with repressive structures and archaic systems that prevent people from taking charge of their lives. Their position is that society ought to take responsibility for the root causes of illiteracy and that the problem often is not the fault of the illiterate person.

One strategy for doing this has been suggested by Paulo Freire (1970), a noted literacy educator from Brazil. Freire's approach is

to raise people's consciousness of their oppression and then to suggest strategies for overcoming it. Working together, people learn not only basic literacy skills but also skills for confronting those forces in society that have kept them powerless. Some attempts have been made to apply Freire's strategy in the U.S., with limited success. As might be expected, the approach is quite controversial.

Influence of Information Technology

Great technical advances have occurred in information storage, retrieval, and transmittal systems. Compact discs (CD-ROM) allow storage of 250,000 pages of information on one disc. By connecting a CD-ROM system to a computer, it is possible to have an encyclopedia-sized information resource available at one's desk. Also, through the use of computers, modems, and national and international databases, it is possible to make vast amounts of information available with the stroke of a few keys.

The distance education movement has concentrated on the use of various technologies to provide greater learning opportunities for adult learners. For instance, by using teleconferencing, students and the instructor can be scattered over great distances. The instructor can use satellite television to provide information, video clips, still photographs, and graphics. In most situations, students can get an instructor's immediate response to their questions via an 800-number telephone system.

Other media provide other opportunities. Interactive computers allow the instructor to be on-line for live instruction. Students can do individual work, which can be monitored by the instructor. Also, various self-directed computer learning packages allow students to learn independently at their own pace and at a time and place that is convenient for them.

Audiotapes have been rediscovered as teaching tools, particularly when so many people now have tape decks in their autos and tape players are so small that people can wear them while they are exer-

cising. An assortment of topics are available, ranging from self-help tapes to fully developed credit and non-credit courses.

The educational use of various electronic media has always been controversial and continues to be so. Critics claim that the only bona fide education is one where teacher and students meet face-to-face. However, test scores have shown little or no difference between learning via media and in classroom settings. But the controversy rages on nonetheless.

Electronic technology approaches are expensive, particularly interactive television involving a satellite. However, when all of the costs are considered – students' travel, instructors' travel to remote sites – then the cost picture often favors the use of technology. Moreover, many students simply cannot travel to a campus to attend classes.

It could be argued that distance educators in colleges and universities, in public schools, and in business and industry are pioneering a new way of providing educational opportunity. Some, myself included, argue that many of these distance educators use educational technology in extremely innovative ways and are moving education toward new definitions of teaching and learning.

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The Future

Gazing into my crystal ball, I see adult education deeply woven into the warp and woof of future society. Everyone in society will see learning as integral to living. Adult education will be available in hundreds of locations, made available by the broadest range of providers, including for-profit businesses.

In the not-too-distant future, I expect to see educational consultants in many shopping centers. These consultants might be compared to financial, family living, or wellness consultants now regularly found throughout the country. These educational consultants, for a fee, will help adults connect with educational providers that will answer their questions or meet their needs. Such consultants could provide information on everything from where to learn square dancing to which colleges and universities provide weekend or evening classes or distance education opportunities for adult degree seekers.

Adult education has a long and interesting history. Its future is likely to be even more interesting.

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